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## A Vast and Varied Biological Preserve

Big Thicket once sprawled over 3.5 million acres of southeast Texas. Today Big Thicket National Preserve protects 15 remnant areas—108,208 acres—with nine habitats. Multiple habitats, and the fact that species from other regions converge to co-exist here, account for this biological preserve's remarkable diversity of animals and plants.

In Big Thicket you won't find a high peak, deep gorge, or other dramatic feature. You will find instead a surprising lushness and density of life. Big Thicket is not a place to hurry through, but a place to discover and to explore.

### From Land . . .



#### LONGLEAF PINE UPLANDS

Native longleaf pines prefer this well-drained soil, but logging and decades of suppressing fire nearly destroyed the species. Preserve staff promotes longleaf pine recovery by planting seedlings and conducting controlled burns to maintain this fire-adapted habitat.

#### SLOPE FOREST

Beech, magnolia, and loblolly pine favor this well-drained habitat. Dense canopies of leaves and needles that shade the forest floor, discourage shrub growth and give the forest its open park-like appearance. It's not the scenery you would expect to find in a "big thicket."



#### ARID SANDYLANDS

Ancient seas and stream currents deposited sand here, forming dunes and sandhills. Sandy soil, hot sun, and rapid drainage create good habitat for prickly pear cacti (above) and the roadrunner (below left), who is more often associated with arid lands. Yucca also grows here, another plant more generally associated with arid lands.

PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS © PHOTODISC

#### WETLAND PINE SAVANNAH

A layer of hardpan clay does double duty in this habitat. It can hold surface water for months or block ground water from rising during dry spells. Pine trees poke long taproots through the clay layer. Carnivorous plants (below) live here, getting vital nitrogen—which this soil lacks—by eating insects.

Pitcher plant



#### Plants that Eat Insects

Of the five species of carnivorous plants in the United States, four grow here: (left to right) bladderwort, butterwort, sundew, and (photo, far right) pitcher plant. They favor nitrogen-poor soils of the wetland



pine savannah. Both pitcher plants and sundews have sticky



globules that insects mistake for drops of dew. Touching the



liquid, an insect will find itself stuck fast.

ILLUSTRATIONS NPS / JOHN DAWSON

Katydid on black-eyed susan



Painted bunting (top), cardinal.

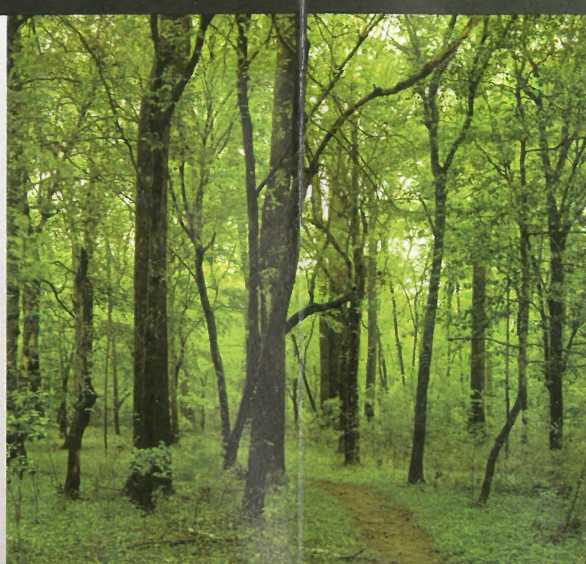


#### PALMETTO HARDWOOD FLATS

The dwarf palmetto palm's fan-shaped fronds (below), give a tropical feel to this hardwood forest's dense understory. Watch for armadillos, who put on surprising bursts of speed despite their short legs.

#### CYPRESS SLOUGH

Bald cypress trees love water. Their fluted trunk and knees—woody protrusions growing up from the roots—help anchor them in wet soil. Water moccasins thrive in swampy areas near streams. In season, tree frogs raise their loud chorus to attract a mate.



#### BOTTOMLAND FLOODPLAIN

Plants that can tolerate both dry spells and episodes of flooding grow here: sweet gum, hickory, oak, and river cane, a native bamboo. When streams flood, water may stand on the land surface for a time rather than draining.



Bobcat

#### BAYGALL

An underlying clay layer traps water in poorly drained depressions called baygalls or acid bogs. Tannin from rotting plants colors the water like coffee or root beer. Tangled vines, the calls of unseen birds, and aquatic animals add to Big Thicket's mystique.



#### ESTUARINE WETLANDS

Below the saltwater barrier (see map) lie marshes, streams with tidal influence, and estuaries where salt and fresh waters mix as brackish water. Estuaries, crucial nursery areas, protect the young of shrimp and other species before they move into deep water.



Snowy egret

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## Explore Your Preserve

The Preserve offers you a diverse mix of recreation. Rivers and creeks host canoeing, boating, kayaking, and fishing. Birders delight in this hotspot for adding species to their life lists. Hunters pursue white-tailed deer, squirrels, rabbits, feral hogs, and waterfowl. Hikers enjoy 40 miles of trails. There are backpacking, bicycling, horseback riding, and ranger-led programs, too. You may even

find one of the Preserve's 20 species of wild orchids or come across evidence of its rich history and cultural heritage.

You can walk where great forests once stood until commercial logging began in the 1800s and drilling for oil began in 1901. In 1877 a news reporter complained: . . . we have to get down on our hands and knees to crawl through the thick, close-knit growth of baygall bushes and canebrakes. Yellow pines

five and six feet in diameter grew here then, and the Big Thicket harbored many black bears, panthers, wolves, and now-extinct ivory-billed woodpeckers. Precious few panthers remain. Black bears might one day return, from those reintroduced in Louisiana.

Follow the footsteps of the Atakapans and Caddos who lived on the edges of the thicket before European contact. Earlier cultures left little trace. Atakapans, hunter-gatherers,

took mussels, fish, birds, and deer. Caddos hunted and grew squash, corn, and beans. In their large villages they built big earthen mounds for ceremonies and burials. Later, Coushatta Indians pushed west by American expansion settled in Texas but suffered as Europeans and Americans vied for control. Alabama Indians later joined the Coushattas on the reservation whose name they now

share. See the land where English and French settlers from east of Texas attempted cotton plantations—but all failed before the mid-1800s. Boomtowns later cropped up around lumber mills, but as logging played out they faded into the Thicket. Oil exploration re-played the boom-and-bust cycle but is still active and you can see modern innovations as you explore the Big Thicket.



Green tree frog



Armadillo



Bearded grass pink orchid





# Your invitation to explore the Big Thicket

**PLACES TO SEE, THINGS TO DO** Some popular areas are listed here, but these are just the beginning. There are nine land and six water units to explore. You can walk in dark, quiet forest, float a cool creek, watch a plant catch a bug, hear the echoing *tap-tap-tap* of a woodpecker, or smell the wildflowers. Take your time and reconnect with nature as you experience the Big Thicket.

**TURKEY CREEK UNIT** With trails from 0.25 to 15 miles long, Turkey Creek is the best unit for experiencing biodiversity. From its sandhills to floodplains, uplands to lowlands, you can explore the mosaic of habitats that is the Big Thicket.

**HICKORY CREEK SAVANNAH** Grassy flatlands with depressions that hold water create the long-leaf pine uplands and wetland savannas here. Short trails take you among insect-eating pitcher plants and circle through the forest. Listen for birds along the trail.

**VILLAGE CREEK CORRIDOR** Village Creek is a popular paddling trail: See coffee-colored waters in forests and sloughs.

**BEAUMONT UNIT** You will find great paddling and fishing here. Water surrounds the area: fresh above the saltwater barrier and brackish (salty) below (see map).

**BIG SANDY CREEK UNIT** Horses and bicycles are allowed on Big Sandy Trail. On Woodlands Trail you see beech, magnolia, and loblolly pine forests and floodplain hardwoods. Beaver Slide Trail winds around ponds that are formed by beaver dams.

**BEECH CREEK UNIT** On Beech Woods Trail you go through slope forest, seeing evidence of the power of hurricanes and the resilience of the vegetation. Take the old logging road past the trailhead to see forest recovering after years of clear-cutting and impacts from pine bark beetles—succession in action. Watch for flying squirrels and for orchids.

**NECHES RIVER CORRIDOR** The upper Neches meanders through pine and hardwood forests. A remote 54-mile section downstream meanders through cypress swamps. Sand-

bars are popular campsites for overnight canoe or kayak trips.

**MENARD CREEK CORRIDOR** Menard Creek flows through upland forest, cypress sloughs, and acid bogs. Birdwatchers Trail leads to a bluff above the Trinity River. Watch for shore birds on sandbars and raptors, like hawks and eagles.

**LANCE ROSIER UNIT** This area honors naturalist Lance Rosier, who devoted his life to saving the Big Thicket. Since pioneer days many had considered the palmetto hardwood flats here the heart of the Big Thicket.

**ENJOYING YOUR VISIT** **Big Thicket Visitor Center** Start here for information, films, exhibits, permits, and a bookstore. The visitor center, open daily, is wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are welcome.

**Activities and Programs** Go to [www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith) or call 409-951-6700 for schedules.

**Accessibility** We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

**Lodging, Camping, Services** Find lodging, private and public campgrounds, food, stores, and services in nearby towns.

**For Your Safety** The preserve is natural and wild. Dangers exist. Your safety is your responsibility. • Stay on trails; it is easy to get lost. • Carry plenty of water; do not drink from the creeks or the ponds. • Avoid snakes; some are venomous. • Protect yourself with insect repellent, a hat, and sunscreen. • Stay away from wasp, bee, and fire ant nests. • Glass containers prohibited on waterways and sandbars.

**Water Safety** There are no lifeguards or designated swimming areas. Swimming is not recommended and never dive or jump into the water. • Wear a personal flotation device (PFD). • Strong currents and underwater debris, common hazards, change with floods. • Rope swings are unauthorized and are very dangerous.

**Protect the Preserve** Federal law protects all plants, animals, and cultural artifacts. No collecting. • Pack out what you pack in. • Pets must be leashed and attended. • For firearms regulations check our website.

**More Information** Big Thicket National Preserve 6044 FM 420 Kountze, TX 77625 409-951-6700 [www.nps.gov/bith](http://www.nps.gov/bith).

Big Thicket National Preserve is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

**Emergencies: Call 911**

